

Spotlight: Los Angeles County Probation Permanency Collaborative

When the court makes an out-of-home placement order, it triggers certain placement-related legal duties by the supervising agency. These duties include placement reviews, applying for funding, and permanency planning. Probation departments have different ways of approaching these responsibilities. In Los Angeles County, the probation department has created a best practices model for permanency planning through a dedicated unit focused on finding and supporting legal permanency options for [probation-involved youth in out-of-home placement](#).

Permanency planning is the legally mandated process of helping youth in out-of-home placements find formal connections to caring adults. A youth's permanency plan might be reunification with a parent, adoption, legal guardianship, or long-term placement with a relative. Over the past decade, there have been eight probation foster youth adoptions in the entire state of California—and the Los Angeles County Probation Department has completed five of those adoptions through its Probation Permanency Collaborative. The Los Angeles County Probation Permanency Collaborative has also facilitated at least 10 legal guardianships and countless incidents of supported reunification with parents and their children in delinquency court.

Los Angeles County supervises approximately 600 probation youth placed in residential care and 70 youth placed with relative caregivers, many of whom could benefit greatly from permanency services. The Los Angeles County Probation Permanency Collaborative came together in 2004 around a single case. Probation was unsure what to do with a youth in the delinquency system and the child welfare agency came in to assist. The two departments ended up working together to create a successful placement and case plan for the youth. This ongoing Permanency Collaborative includes various key stakeholders, such as probation officers, social workers, a representative from County Counsel (to ensure the group is following the proper dependency and delinquency regulations), and staff from two community based organizations, Kids Safe and the Alliance for Children's Rights. Regular monthly meetings of the Permanency Collaborative help get upfront buy-in from stakeholders, giving the partnership more muscle. With the assistance of permanency training provided by the UC Davis Resource Center for Family-Focused Practice, the Permanency Collaborative has been able to successfully leverage Child and Family Teams, resource families, community based mental health and health care services, and other supports to improve placement stability, youth well-being, and more.

There are four main funding streams for the model permanency work of Los Angeles County Probation Department:

- State-administered Child Welfare Services Outcome Improvement Project (CWSOIP) funding aids permanency services and family finding efforts as part of Los Angeles County's System Improvement Plan (SIP).
- State-level [Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention, and Support \(FPRRS\)](#) funding is used to recruit resource families, transportation and hotels for reunification, and to

conduct an advertising campaign to find more families that might be interested in working with this population.

- [Federal Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project](#) funds are used to expand evidence-based Functional Family Therapy provided by probation officers that are licensed therapists to help better support youth placed with possible permanent connections.
- [Subsidized permanency](#) programs provide funding directly to youth and their families. These programs include the [Adoption Assistance Program \(AAP\)](#), [Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program \(Kin-GAP\)](#), and [state AFDC-FC](#) (for youth who attain permanency through a guardianship with a non-relative). Both Kin-GAP and AAP continue until the youth turns 21 as long as the payment began after the youth was 16. Youth in non-related legal guardianships can receive funding until 21 regardless of their age when the guardianship was ordered.

Two components critical to the success of Los Angeles's permanency work for probation youth involve the pairing of probation officers and the specialized permanency training they receive. After researching promising practices for probation-led permanency efforts around the country, the Los Angeles County Probation Department began assigning two officers to each ward. A deputy placement officer does case work and supervision, while a permanency officer does family finding and outreach to identify potential permanent connections, mainly done through searches of databases and social media, and general and targeted recruitment for foster and adoptive parents.

Proper training has been key to Los Angeles's success with permanency planning. Placement Core Training for new and experienced probation officers is provided by the UC Davis Resource Center for Family-Focused Practice.¹ Prior to the UC Davis curriculum, probation training in Los Angeles was correctional-centered, not focused on child welfare and permanency. About 100 Los Angeles County probation officers have received permanency training through UC Davis, provided free of charge through a grant the university received from the California Department of Social Services. Enhancing the training and aligning with the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR), UC Davis also provides Child and Family Team trainings to probation departments. Additional specialized trainings are provided by local placement providers like Seneca Family of Agencies. The Judicial Council also provides technical assistance and training to probation officers and judges. There are also cross-training opportunities where child welfare and probation partners provide trainings for each other.

Another key to success has been a culture shift toward an increased focus on permanency throughout the Los Angeles Probation Department. This begins with hiring, which is done through a "Special Recruitment Posting" that aims to hire officers who are caring and passionate about youth, have area expertise, are research-oriented to help with family finding, and are able to create detailed reports for court. The language used in the posting is intentional and important to the overall culture shift. For instance, the program is called "Probation Child Welfare," acknowledging the expanded welfare responsibilities for probation. Terms like "youth" and "children" are used instead of "minors" or "juveniles."

Probation youth are also being reframed as victims and survivors of trauma, not just offenders. Finally, probation foster youth are invited to attend local community events (to participate, speak, sing, dance, etc.) such as the College Youth Summit and the Success is Our Future conference.

Youth who exit probation foster care to permanency are not eligible for extended foster care while they are still being supported by their guardian or adoptive parent. Instead, they receive supports from their legal caregiver and funding until 21 through [subsidized permanency payments](#) (e.g., [AAP](#), [Kin-GAP](#), or [AFDC-FC](#)). If the permanency arrangement fails after 18 (e.g., the caregiver dies or no longer continues to provide support), those youth may re-enter extended foster care through the court's transition jurisdiction under Welfare and Institutions Code section 388.1. As long as the permanency plan is successful, these are not part of the probation department's extended foster care supervision requirements. By reducing extended foster care caseloads, probation departments may be able to focus more staff time on permanency planning.

While Los Angeles has had success with their dedicated permanency project, there remain many barriers for other counties that want to build or expand their probation permanency operations. Some of these barriers reported by interviewed probation staff include family readiness, probation staff buy-in and training, and availability of resources. Family readiness can be an obstacle when biological family members are opposed to a permanency plan. In some cases when a lost parent is located in order to get permission for a permanency arrangement, as is required by law, the parent then contests the adoption or guardianship. Probation officers who haven't been trained or haven't bought into the process can also undermine permanency efforts. If a probation officer is not supportive, they may give a youth an unnecessary probation violation or send a kid to a camp or ranch, making permanency more difficult. CCR attempts to address these issues by requiring newly implemented Child and Family Teams to inform such decisions before they unilaterally get made by a probation officer. Other barriers to permanency are related to resource availability. Smaller or rural counties may not have enough staff to provide each youth with two probation officers—one focusing on probation supervision and the other on permanency services. Financially, using non-permanent funding sources, such as Title IV-E Waiver funds and FPRRS funds, makes it tough to start paying for permanency activities and for probation and child welfare agencies to plan for these activities to continue on a permanent basis.

¹ The UC Davis Resource Center for Family-Focused Practice is supported by the California Department of Social Services and provides tailored services and training to support juvenile probation placement officers and supervisors. The courses listed are open for enrollment for Probation Placement Officers and Supervisors. UC Davis Extension, Center for Human Services, *Probation*, <https://humanservices.ucdavis.edu/program-courses/1543>.